

KINSHIP AND FAMILY LIFE

65

storm the bride's homestead and throw spears into her courtyard; in the end the bride gives herself up and goes to the dancing ground. Then the bride's mother takes a shield and spear and throws spears at the retreating bridegroom; he dodges these and retaliates by throwing a specially good spear at the women, which they keep as a memento. Finally the drums give the signal for a dance, and the bridegroom, dressed in a leopard skin, dances with the bride and her people. A drinking bout concludes the ceremony. 585

Hofmayr describes a rite in which bride and bridegroom ceremonially wash each other's hands.¹ Mr. Heasty suggests that this may refer to the washing of bride and bridegroom by the *waja* (father's sister) of the bride. When the bride first comes to live in her husband's homestead her *waja* accompanies her and initiates her in the duties of a wife. After the first night the couple have spent together the *waja* comes early in the morning and washes the husband and then the wife, and anoints their bodies with oil. This is repeated on several mornings. 585 604

Mr. Heasty describes a further ceremony in which washing plays a part. Before the birth of her first child a woman goes to her parents' house, and when the child is old enough for her to return with it to her husband her friends brew quantities of beer. This they take to the husband's village, where she returns with her mother and grandmother. The people of the husband's village drink the beer, a gourd of water is passed round and everyone drops in it some gift, which will be given to the women who have brewed the beer; at the same time the men wash their hands. This Mr. Heasty states is a public ceremony, exhibiting the child and signifying the fulfilment of the marriage. The bride-wealth has been given, the two families are friends, the husband need no longer serve his parents-in-law; in case of need his wife may even go to her parents and beg food from them. 951 [844] [273]

The bride-wealth consists of cows, sheep, and spears, typically as follows:— 583

Dak nam, the cattle of the marriage. Usually ten cows, but more may be paid if a man is very attracted to his betrothed.

Disk nam, the sheep of the marriage.

Jam nam, spears and other goods.

The *dak nam* are taken by the father, but he cannot keep them all; indeed, in some cases it might happen that he would keep none.

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

XXXIV

Introduction

here articles of purchase and sale are calculated in silver currency.

The daily work of the women is cooking, carrying water, cleaning the house and yard, etc. During the time of farmwork they help the men in cultivating the fields.

FOOD The staple food is dura. It is cooked, baked into a bread (*kern*), roasted, brewed and, when green, eaten raw. For different kinds of food vide page 102. Their diet is rather monotonous, dura being its constant chief component. The dura is pounded and ground. The mortar is either a log of wood hollowed out, or a flat excavation in the ground, lined out with clay. The mill-stones — a large and a small one, with the latter the grinding is done — are secured from districts west of the Shilluk country. — Fire is made by twirling a hard stick on a soft piece of wood.

Besides dura they eat sesame, *duchu*, maize, beans, some onions, various grass seeds, the seeds of the lotus plant and of some kinds of nymphaeae. The fruit of several trees, as *deleib*, *nabag*, etc. also serve as food; they even rob ant hills to procure the winter store of hoarded seeds. White ants, when in the winged state, are a delicacy to them. — Milk is used in the household in many ways: it is drunk fresh, sour, or boiled, or dura meals are prepared with it. They also make butter, by shaking or rolling the milk in a gourd. — As domestic animals are almost never slain, meat forms no part of the daily food, but is rather an exceptional delicacy, which is, however, sought for with eagerness; of game they hardly leave any piece uneaten, skin and bowels not excepted; they do not even despise dead animals. The blood of killed animals is kept and cooked, but they do not tap the blood from living cattle, as is the custom with the Bari and Masai. — Generally they prefer the meat of castrated animals.

Two chief meals are taken daily; one from nine to ten in the morning, and the second at sunset.

A large quantity of the dura the people reap is used in cooking *merisa* or beer. The grain is put into jars and water poured on it. Thus it is left till the grain begins to sprout. Then it is spread in the sun to dry, and then pounded or ground; this wet meal is mixed with flour from the fresh grain and put a second time into jars which are filled with water. After stirring and mixing well, a little dry meal is sprinkled on it; the jars are covered with small mats and allowed to remain a day or two, until it begins to ferment, when a little more water and meal are added. When the whole mass is well fermented it is filtered through a grass funnel, and the following day is ready for use. It will keep about a week. Though this drink is slightly intoxicating, it does not seem to do great harm; it is very nourishing, and the natives regard it rather as a food than a beverage.

437

177

462

512

262

[252]

[42]

[372]

[231]

[77]

264

373

BREWING OF
BEER

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN IDLE SHILLUK

253

Houses are swept out soon after dawn by older women and small girls, and they are responsible for the collection of firewood for cooking purposes.

462
512
[356]

Very soon after the return of the water-carrying party the sound of dura pounding is heard on all sides, and this work and the preparation of native beer for the household goes on intermittently all day; the meal times for men being about 10 a.m. and 7 p.m., while the women snatch meals at odd hours.

[273]
[264]

At the time of writing every spare moment of the day is spent by the women in sowing the dura and maize crop around the village, the work proceeding steadily from dawn to dusk.

[241]

Even after dark the women have to finish the preparation and serve the evening meal to their men, and, as this is the main meal of the day, woe betide the wife who has not prepared it in time or to the satisfaction of her lord!

[252]
[264]
[293]

At about 5.30 p.m. the small boys return with the goats and sheep, and these—after having been re-united with their offspring—are turned into the *luks* for the night.

512
233
867

Then smoke fires are lighted in readiness for the cattle which are herded in at dusk, tied up with head ropes, and milked; these duties keep nearly all the men busy until after 7 p.m., soon after which the cultivators return from their labours.

233
512
462

Rather than call the Shilluk a lazy race, let us say that they understand the art of taking their ease restfully!

643 happy to be given to *Kwas*¹⁵? Perhaps you too are praying just as we are? Do you know *Kwas*? He is there being guarded; soon he will come out and start his journey." Then the old man addressed Nyikang, "*Kwas*, you are great; we are all your children, even this goat, and we are here to serve you." Then the goat was led away. I asked about the goat and they said it would not be killed, but would return to the flock as a sign that all the flocks belonged to Nyikang.

[273] About this time I heard one of the young men say he was thirsty and when I jokingly asked him if there was no beer in the village for them, he said that no beer would be drunk that day in all the land, until after the king had been inducted at Fashoda.

[778] I asked about the gods and they said they were being prepared for the journey and soon would come out of the houses. The houses were not shrines but belonged to the chief of the village, and nothing had been done to them except a new fence of cornstalks built around the door. I asked if I might go inside the enclosure, and when no one objected, I entered the *hal*, and found six men seated on the ground and two sacred drums one on each side of the door of the house, each on a cow skin. I took some pictures of the *hal* with the men and drums, but when I suggested that I enter the house where Nyikang resided, they demurred, and one man took up a position against the mat door, to bar my entrance.

At 8.30 the two drums were beaten five or six strokes each, and I thought things were going to start, but all the people bowed themselves to the ground and said, "*Kwas* speaks. *Kwas*, you are great *Kwas*, speak to us."

533 Five minutes later, two young men came out of the *hal* carrying
643 the sacred drums (small black drums not unlike kettle drums), and
[534] each sat on a cow-skin and alternately beat his drum with the handle
[778] of a hippo-hide whip. (These drums they call *hom*). The beat was not that of a dance, but a regular tum, ta, ta, ta, tum; repeated over

15. *Kwas*—our ancestor.

643 to the mound of Fashoda, which is called Aturwic, and with it the shield and spears of Nyikang.

The *reth* was now in seclusion. No one but his most personal attendants might visit him. We were told that he would be stripped, bathed, and clothed in new robes during that afternoon. It was neither seemly nor possible to enquire too deeply into this part of the investiture, for it is conducted in strict secrecy. There is evidence that this ritual bathing takes place within the temporary camp Adul, because the smaller of the two huts is known as the "bathing room." Shilluk say that the *reth* is bathed alternately with hot and cold water, so that he shall not be subjected to extremes of temperature. It is a symbolic rite emphasizing his people's desire that he shall rule them with even temper throughout his reign. The fact is mentioned by [117] Munro in his account of Fasiti's installation (Note 18), and informants confirmed the tradition at the installation of *reth* Anci.

During the heat of the day the main crowds dispersed to their homes, but there were still large numbers of Shilluk sitting in and around Fashoda that evening. Most of these were relatives and friends of the inhabitants of the capital, who provided them with refreshment, since the ban on drinking beer was lifted after the *reth*'s retirement. The Ororo and attendants of the *reth* were putting up wind-screens round the *reth*'s camp, under which they would sleep [273] that night to guard him from possible attack. The danger to the [669] *reth*'s life was not yet over, a fact which repeatedly appeared from the care and attention of his guardians. The Shilluk describe this period of the ceremonies as "the *reth*'s camp outside Fashoda", and it was evident that he had not, in the eyes of the Shilluk, entered his capital. His final acceptance by Nyikang and by the Shilluk people still remained in doubt, though one of the most dangerous periods of his initiation from election to final installation had been successfully passed.

The same evening outside the shrine of Nyikang some of the

Shilluk Life

25

the place very inviting, or, if one must enter, tempt one to linger. One is happy to conclude's one's business and escape to the comfort of the hut opposite. 343

This is the living and sleeping hut, and is usually much more clean and tidy than the other. The hard earth floor is neatly smoothed over with mud and carefully swept. Several cow hides hang on the walls or rest against them, and one of these is placed for the visitor to sit upon crosslegged, or a small platform made of light ambac wood may be brought forward for his accommodation. Lying against the wall is also the tall war shield of toughened hippopotamus hide belonging to the master of the house and his two spears, one his fighting spear, seven feet in length with a broad, smooth, highly polished, leaf-shaped blade on a straight, slender shaft of brown wood; the other his fishing spear, a foot shorter in length and with a long, narrow, triangular blade armed with ugly, serrated barbs. Inside the hut we may find several men; some sit in the neat way the Shilluk have with one foot tucked beneath them, a posture impossible for a stiff-jointed European, but one which they can maintain for long periods without the slightest discomfort. The host is dispensing beer to his guests from a large pot placed in the centre of the floor, and a generous bowl, holding about a quart, will be offered to you. This beer is made from fermented millet, and looks, and tastes, rather like cold cocoa. Courtesy demands that you take some, so you sip a little slowly, balance the bowl in your lap for a while, take another small drink and hand the bowl to your neighbour who finishes it off with avidity. You linger over a cigarette while the others pass round a pipe filled with rank, home-grown tobacco, or, if this is scarce, with charcoal. A Shilluk pipe has a large bowl made of clay, fire baked, fancifully carved and picked out in red and white and black; into this is fitted a wooden stem, two feet long and an inch in diameter, with a bulbous mouthpiece made from the stem of a gourd. With a complete disregard for hygiene a member of the party takes the pipe from the man next to him, puts it to his mouth, sucks vigorously for a few moments, his cheeks going in and out 342 [356] 352 [516] 411 [237] [227] 516 273 574 276 574 [537]

765 songs the while. Since this is a more modest affair than the
535 dance for a prince or a chief, the whole company can remain
in the arena during the whole afternoon. The matrons too,
but not the young girls, take part in the dancing, marching
in a small circle round the drums, some carrying a spear or
a sword or a stick 'at the slope'.

[533] There is a pause in the proceedings and a sudden hush
falls on the gathering. The song maker who all the afternoon
has been leading the singing with tremendous voice and
energy, now stands by the stilled tom-toms and chants the
names of those who are being commemorated that day. The
drumming and singing, the dancing and the marching
recommence and continue until about an hour before sun-

• [273] set. Beer in large quantities has been prepared for the
hoarse and dust-choked warriors, and as they drink, the
765 cattle are distributed among the various villages taking part.

Each beast is slaughtered near the hut of one of those whose
death is the reason for the celebration, and the meat is
divided by the village chiefs and portions allotted to different
householders in each village. As one may well imagine, the
[578] division, first of the cattle and then of the meat, is not carried
out in any spirit of amity and fraternal charity, but is
accompanied by much wrangling and acrimony between
village and village and individual and individual.

It is dark before everybody is satisfied, or rather, has got
all that he is likely to get, and the dancers, some happily
bearing a bloody burden, others grumbling at the smallness
of their portion, stream along the road to their homes and
supper. All obligations to the dead are satisfied; may they
rest in peace.